

Hobbies

Bicentennial quarters a two-bit investment

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—For several years I've been collecting Bicentennial quarters dated 1776-1976. Do you think they will become valuable in the next 50 years?

R. D., Skokie

A—No. Uncle Sam made nearly 1.7 billion such coins, the second highest one-year mintage for quarters on record. All Bicentennial quarters in circulation are made of copper and nickel, not silver, and depict a Colonial drummer on the tails side.

Duo-dated quarters taken from pocket change might be worth a bit more than face value by the year 2040, but you'd probably get a much better return by placing the money in a savings account.

Q—I make bracelets out of silver dimes and copper cents. The question has come up if that's illegal.

M. G., Park Ridge

A—No, but if you nick or

scratch the coins as you attach them to the bracelet, you will reduce their value as collectibles.

Q—Do the so-called "Mercury dimes" have special value?

J. N., Chicago

A—Definitely. All such coins—which were made between 1916 and 1945—contain .07 of an ounce of silver, worth nearly 40 cents at current precious-metal prices. Dimes dated 1931 or earlier and in at least "good condition" have additional value as collector items, as do some of the more recent issues. The two rarest are the 1916-D (for Denver) with a retail value of about \$300 in "good" and the famous 1942 with the digit "1" over the "2," which goes for \$150 or more in "good."

Q—A few years ago I was told that 1943 silver pennies were worth about 20 cents each. Is that still true?

T. R., Chicago Heights

A—Yes, assuming your coins merit the "fine condition" category. Also, 1943 Lincoln cents

were made with zinc-coated steel, not silver.

Q—Each year since 1971 we have ordered several sets of proof and uncirculated coins from the federal government. Have they proven to be a good investment? We may want to sell the sets because they are eating up space.

P. O., Chicago

A—You probably would do no better than break even by selling to a coin dealer. A few sets—such as the 1985 and 1986 uncirculated issues—have more than doubled in price on the hobby market. But most sets have experienced only modest advances, while some sell for less than the government issue price.

Q—Are the one-ounce American Eagle coins pure silver?

T. P., Wheaton

A—The silver Eagle—Uncle Sam's most popular "bullion coin"—contains 99.93 percent silver and .07 percent copper. Dealers sell the coin for the value of the metal plus a sales commission of approximately \$2.